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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000824

C O R R E C T E D COPY - PARA NUMBERS CORRECTED

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B.WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR J. HARMON AND L. DOBBINS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT NEWS DAILIES PREPARE TO PUBLISH

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Classified By: CDA Donald Petterson for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Despite ZANU-PF foot-dragging, the new Media Commission, with the power to license newspapers, is expected to be announced shortly. Trevor Ncube, publisher of weekly papers The Independent and The Standard, plans to begin publishing a daily, NewsDay. The Daily News, shut down by the government in 2004, is planning to renew daily publication under former editor Geoffrey Nyarota. Meanwhile, MDC ministers are attempting to undo recent appointments of ZANU-PF loyalists to media boards. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) MDC sources have told us that upon President Robert Mugabe's return from the UNGA, he and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai met and decided upon the membership of the new Media Commission which will be responsible inter alia for licensing newspapers. The chair will be former Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) chief executive Henry Muradzikwa, who was dismissed from the ZBC after the March 2008 elections, apparently for being insufficiently partisan.

¶3. (C) Despite Mugabe's statement in his speech to Parliament on October 6, that the establishment of the Media Commission, as well as the Electoral, Human Rights, and Anti-Corruption Commissions, was imminent, its formation has not been announced. George Charamba, Ministry of Information permanent secretary and Mugabe spokesperson, recently stated that the Media Commission would not be announced until members of the other three commissions had been selected. (NOTE: Interviews of candidates for the Electoral and Human Rights Commissions have taken place, but Mugabe and Tsvangirai have not yet met to select members. END NOTE.) In a conversation with the Charge on October 14, Deputy Prime

Minister Arthur Mutambara noted there was no legal requirement that all Commissions be announced simultaneously.

He accused Charamba and others of foot-dragging; they know that formation of the Media Commission will result in the publication of independent dailies which will in turn be a direct threat to the ZANU-PF mouthpiece, The Herald.

(COMMENT: Mutambara acknowledged that the decision to launch the Media Commission was up to the principals: himself, Mugabe and Tsvangirai. Given that Mutambara and Tsvangirai strongly support the Media Commission and independence of the press, this is an example of Mugabe's power to frustrate implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA). END COMMENT.)

14. (C) In recent conversations, publisher of The Independent and The Standard Trevor Ncube has told us of his intention to publish a daily, NewsDay. Ncube had received legal opinions that there was no legal basis to prevent him from publishing--the old Media and Information Commission with licensing powers was defunct as a result of the GPA--but was afraid the Ministry of Information could tie him up in court, Qafraid the Ministry of Information could tie him up in court, jeopardizing his investment, were he to publish without official permission. Therefore, he decided to await the formation of the Media Commission.

15. (C) A representative of the Media Development Loan Fund (www.mdlf.org), which supports Ncube's Mail and Guardian in South Africa, visited us last week. She said her organization is investing \$3 million dollars equity in NewsDay and providing an additional \$1 million loan. A used Swedish printing press is now being set up in Harare and Ncube would like to begin a print run of 30,000 on November 1. She added that if Ncube had not received Media Commission approval by November 1, he would wait a reasonable time and then begin printing even without a license.

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16. (C) Geoffrey Nyarota, former editor of the Daily News, spoke with us this week. Nyarota was fired by publisher Strive Masiyiwa as a result of labor and financial issues in 2003, a year before the government shut the newspaper down. Nyarota said Masiyiwa had since divested himself of ownership by putting the Daily News in a trust, although he still maintains influence with the trustees. The trust intends to employ Nyarota as editor-in-chief. He was in Harare to fund raise for start-up money.

17. (C) Nyarota said the Daily News also planned to wait for Media Commission approval. He stated that the initial print run would be 50,000 and, because of the name recognition of the paper, which had a circulation of about 120,000 when it ceased publishing, and its reputation for tough journalism, he expected it to eclipse NewsDay and the Herald. (NOTE: The Herald now has a circulation of about 15,000; The Independent, published on Fridays and The Standard published on Sundays have similar circulations. END NOTE.) Nyarota told us the Daily News had an existing press, but money was a concern.

18. (C) On September 30, Webster Shamu, Minister of Information, made appointments to six media parastatals including Zimpapers (the publisher of The Herald, The Manica Post in Mutare, and The Chronicle in Bulawayo) and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holding (television). Appointments included military officials. According to Tsvangirai advisor Gorden Moyo, Tsvangirai argued to Mugabe that these appointments violated the GPA and Mugabe agreed to rescind them.

COMMENT

19. (C) Charamba told a recent UNESCO-sponsored meeting on media that publishers of new newspapers who did not have

Media Commission approval would be subject to prosecution. Charamba appears to be attempting to delay the inevitable. We believe in the next couple of months, if not sooner, independent dailies will begin publishing. This will undoubtedly hurt The Herald, which is not much more than a ZANU-PF propaganda organ.

¶10. (C) What is less clear is whether the Daily News and NewsDay will avoid self-censorship and engage in hard-hitting criticism and investigative journalism to expose corruption at the highest levels. And if they do so, how will ZANU-PF react? Also uncertain is whether Zimbabwe can sustain two dailies, each charging \$1 per day, when per capita income is about the same.

¶11. (C) In the relatively closed media environment of Zimbabwe, the publication of independent newspapers will be a significant development. But the major impact will probably be in urban areas, as distribution to rural areas, particularly the ZANU-PF stronghold of Mashonaland, will likely be limited. What would be important in these areas is radio; at present we are unaware of any efforts to establish national and independent radio. END COMMENT.

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